

Yotsuya Bridge Club - November 2023

When I knew we were going to Japan for a family holiday, I googled the Japan Contract Bridge Association and emailed them, asking where along our route were bridge clubs. For domestic harmony I decided to limit the bridge to a game in Tokyo near where we were staying.

The manager at Yotsuya BC, Mr Akito Omasa emailed and advised they had games every day at 10.30am or 1.30pm and I was welcome to come along any time without a partner. They would find me someone. So I emailed and advised I'd be there in a couple of days time.

We'd had the services of a guide in Tokyo on our first day sightseeing so I'd had the chance to ascertain the best route and train to take - both metro and Japan Rail lines were a mere two stops away from where we were staying once I found the right line and platform. Leaving early to get there turned to be a godsend as I got the right line, however it was immediately obvious I was going in the wrong direction, so I had to exit at the first available station and backtrack 180 degrees.

Once I found the building it was a relief - navigating streets, addresses, routes and even buildings in a foreign language when the signs aren't even decipherable is a bit trickier than I imagined. I was fortunate that people along the route were very happy to help and had much better English than my Japanese.

Once inside the building, I met the directors on duty and was introduced to the manager Akito. There were three sessions happening concurrently - one was training and another a higher grade of preorganised competition. Akito advised he would play with me, so we played a limited Howell of maybe 7 x 4 board rounds (check).

They still had acrylic separators for Covid on each table and draped table numbers over the mid point so people could see which tables were in play. Almost everyone wore masks - I think voluntarily - as no-one asked me to put one on. They moved the masks to drink. Coffees were dispatched from vending machines in the main room, which also supplied cold drinks.

Photo of acrylic shields on tables



Photos of vending machines



The system cards backed onto standard board cards records, which was a very efficient and effective way of discussing and recording play - see example attached. At the end of play a report is printed out via their ricefield system to show how your partnership scored. Imps scoring is used exclusively or so it seemed to me. Within 2 minutes of starting, it felt like any other Bridge Club, perhaps a little more reserved in terms of getting to know your opponents, but by and large, everyone was speaking the same language.

Photo of one paper - back to back, system card, and record of play.



The results are recorded on the Yotsuya website, however I couldn't find a comparative assessment - a la Pianola or our system. This may be a language limitation.

<http://ricefieldsystem.com/tournamentResultSystem/tournamentResult.html?clubCode=3ec001>

In terms of the amenities, as with most toilets in Japan, the seats in the women's toilets at the Bridge Club can be warmed, and there are options for spray and pressure from below to cleanse the derrière. Noises in the toilet can be obscured by pressing a privacy button which plays piped river sounds. This was a major improvement on anything I'd experienced and my first thought on return was that we were back to "bog standard" loos.



Akito emailed me the results and invited me back. I followed up a fortnight later and he paired me with another partner, Terada. Terada was a naval officer and a fellow bridge tragic who once a month got a leave pass from work and family and travelled 2 hours by train to play morning and afternoon sessions. He was a steady and considerate player who enjoyed the spirit of the game. We were fortunate to win that 7 table Howell movement. Akito asked me to wait for the result, and to my surprise awarded Terada and me with a gift voucher for a free game at the club, valid for up a year. If anyone is going to Tokyo and wants a game, they would be welcomed at Yotsuya.

Photo of my partners Terada (l) and Akito (r) with me



Photo of gift certificate - valid for a year from date of issue.



I asked Akito about memberships, but there may have been a language constraint, as I wasn't clear they had members. Casual play was 1000 yen (equivalent of \$10). I wanted to know how many employees they had, but the question was misconstrued. Akito told me the Japan Contract Bridge occupied the basement of the building. Apropos of nothing, I did notice they used the same photocopier as CBC.

All in all, a very satisfying cultural and social diversion.

Tamara